

Eighth Grade

Summer 2026 Book Report #2

Sr Aisha – English

Essay Assignment: Killing Mr. Griffin

Topic: The Puppet Master and the Pack

The Prompt

In *Killing Mr. Griffin*, Lois Duncan explores how a group of "basically good" people can be led into doing something evil.

Write a 5-paragraph analytical essay that examines the power of manipulation. Specifically, analyze how Mark Kinney uses the individual weaknesses and emotional needs of his peers—Susan, David, Jeff, and Betsy—to coerce them into a kidnapping plot that turns into murder. Was Mr. Griffin's death an unavoidable accident, or the logical result of the group's collective choices?

Requirements

- Introduction: Introduce the novel's southwestern setting and the central conflict. End with a thesis statement that identifies why Mark was successful in manipulating the group.
 - Body Paragraph 1: The Vulnerable Target (Susan). Explain how Susan's isolation and desire for acceptance make her the perfect "decoy" for the group.
 - Body Paragraph 2: The Mask of Leadership (Mark). Analyze Mark's psychopathic traits—his lack of remorse, his charm, and his history of violence (like the fire).
 - Body Paragraph 3: The Diffusion of Responsibility. Discuss how the group uses excuses (like Mr. Griffin's angina or "it was just a prank") to avoid facing their own guilt.
 - Conclusion: Summarize your findings on peer pressure and reflect on whether the legal consequences at the end of the book were fair for each character.
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Grading Rubric: Killing Mr. Griffin Essay

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations (90–100%)	Meets Expectations (75–89%)	Needs Improvement (<75%)
Character Analysis	Profound understanding of Mark's psychopathy vs. the others' susceptibility.	Identifies basic character motivations for the kidnapping.	Confuses characters or lacks understanding of their motives.
Thematic Depth	Masterfully connects the plot to broader themes of peer pressure and justice.	Addresses themes of guilt and choice clearly.	Focuses only on plot summary ("who did what").
Textual Evidence	Uses specific, relevant quotes (e.g., the Stanford ring or the "decoy" plan).	Includes 2-3 quotes that generally support the points.	Lacks direct evidence from the book.
Structure	Logical progression; each paragraph builds on the previous one.	Follows the 5-paragraph model with clear transitions.	Disorganized; jumps between different scenes without a clear path.